

## **Learner Autobiography and Philosophy of Education**

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ITL 600: Becoming a Teacher

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May 10, 2020

### **Abstract**

The purpose of this essay is to examine my own views and motivations regarding education and teaching, and how my personal experiences as a student have shaped those views and motivations. In the first half of the essay I explore my own personal experiences in education. In the second half I look the results of my philosophy of education survey. Specifically, I look at two philosophies: Progressivism, the top ranked philosophy for me, and Essentialism, a philosophy that I thought would rank at the top rank but ranked third. I discuss how my personal experiences contributed to the development of my views and how Progressivism, as a philosophy, coincide with my personal beliefs and values. Completing the philosophy of education survey allowed for in eye opening revelation of some of the driving philosophies that influence my decision making and perspectives as a new teacher.

*Keywords:* progressivism, essentialism, educational philosophy, teaching philosophy, student centered philosophy, discipline, authoritarian, student needs,

### **Learner Autobiography and Philosophy of Education**

In middle school and high school, I had good and bad academic experiences. Back then if you asked me why, for example, the students in Mr. Jonsson's 6<sup>th</sup> grade classroom were not listening and learning, I couldn't tell you the reason. I could tell you the little things that were happening in the classroom that I knew were not okay. For example, it was not okay when my friends and I sat in the back and cheated on our science test because we hadn't been paying attention leading up to the test. What he was doing wasn't working because we were not learning. Then there were teachers like my high school English teacher whose classroom was highly structured. There was a routine. Every day you came in and you knew exactly what you had to do, and you did it. Ms. Holmes, another high school teacher was more easy going. She taught math. She offered more variety in the way she presented material and she assigned less work, but students were learning in her classroom as well.

Through my substitute teaching experiences and after reading a summary of the philosophies in *Teachers, Schools and Society*, I began to understand my middle school and high school teachers. I can see why some were not as effective as others. I realized, having systems and procedures in place in the classroom is important. Students need structure. This is what my English teacher, Ms. Stacia, did well and Mr. Jonsson lacked. Ms. Stacia's way of running a classroom was authoritarian. Ms. Holmes, on the other hand was less authoritarian. She focused on engaging her students and making class fun. The effectiveness of Ms. Holmes's methods suggests a highly structured classroom is not the only effectively way to manage a classroom.

### **Surprising Results: Educational Philosophy Survey**

The results of the educational philosophy survey were surprising. The survey revealed that my personal beliefs align well with the teaching philosophy called Progressivism. The

results showed that I also have many values that fall in the category of Existentialism.

Essentialism, Perennialism, and Social Reconstructionism fell in third, fourth, and fifth rank respectively. I had assumed the result would show my beliefs to align with Essentialism, and I was surprised that it fell third. After reading more about each philosophy I begin to understand results.

Essentialists expect that students will leave school possessing disciplined, practical minds, capable of applying schoolhouse lessons in the real world (Sadker, 1997, p. 157). I grew up in a strict environment. Discipline was emphasized in my family. For that reason, I assumed Essentialism was where my beliefs and values would align. But, essentialists frown upon electives that water-down academic content (Sadker, 1997, p. 156). I believe in the importance of teaching extracurriculars such as art and music, and for that reason Essentialism falls short in enveloping my believes and values.

Progressivism is a philosophy that is student-centered. Looking back at the way Ms. Holmes managed her classroom, the philosophy underpinning her methods were progressivist, because she focused on student needs. Progressivism is less authoritarian and less concerned with the past and ‘training the mind’ and more focused on individual needs, contemporary relevance, and preparing students for a changing future (Sadker, 1997, p. 159). Mathematical content is unchanging but how we apply it is constantly changing. Technology evolves and change with every year. I’ve noticed myself integrating new technology into my math lessons, when I substitute teach (I want to be a math teacher). For this reason, progressivism fits well as a personal philosophy for me. Isn’t that what the Association of American Educators had in mind when they stated, “the professional educator continues professional growth” (2018). How can we grow if we do not adapt to our changing world and prepare students to do the same?

## Conclusion

Once I began substitute teaching, I began learning. Ultimately, I want to contribute to the academic journey students undertake and to meet student needs. Students have feedback to offer teachers if we listen; I am learning to listen to my students and to listen to the world around me. Since, I am a student focused and I desire to meet the needs of students, Progressivism fits me best as a teaching philosophy. My teaching philosophy may evolve and become more refined throughout the years, but I hope to continue to meet the needs of students.

Moore says, “My purpose for developing an educational philosophy is to reflect on and improve my classroom interaction and overall effectiveness.” (Moore, 2015,) about his teacher philosophy. For new teachers it is important not only to have a personal philosophy behind teaching, but to also know the why behind one. Putting in words the driving factors for having a philosophy can serve as motivation for the pursuit of fulfilling it. A teaching philosophy will evolve but remembering the reasons for wanting to do the job will be a driving force to refine the philosophy and continue pursuing it.

## References

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